

DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL OF FLORIDA, SECOND DISTRICT

Penny v. State of Florida

No. 2D2024-0032 (Fla. 2d DCA Oct. 1, 2025) · No. 2D2024-0032 · Decided October 1, 2025

SUMMARY

The Florida Second District Court of Appeal reversed Jaquone R. Penny's convictions and sentences for attempted second-degree murder and aggravated battery with a deadly weapon. The court held that the State presented insufficient evidence that Penny had the conscious intent required to be convicted as a principal, and remanded the case for discharge.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	District Court of Appeal of Florida, Second District
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Black, J.; Kelly, J.; Atkinson, J.
JURISDICTION	Florida District Court of Appeal, Second District
DECIDED	October 1, 2025
DOCKET	2D2024-0032
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Penny appealed his judgment and sentences following convictions for two counts of attempted second-degree murder and two counts of aggravated battery with a deadly weapon. He challenged the denial of his motion for judgment of acquittal.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The sufficiency of the evidence supporting the denial of a motion for judgment of acquittal is reviewed under whether competent, substantial evidence would permit a rational trier of fact to find the required elements beyond a reasonable doubt.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Florida District Court of Appeal opinion
PARTIES	Jaquone R. Penny v. State of Florida

TOPICS

criminal procedure evidence appellate procedure standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law criminal procedure appellate practice

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court erred by denying Penny's motion for judgment of acquittal when the State failed to present evidence that he had the conscious intent required for principal liability.
2. Whether the State presented sufficient evidence of the overt act or words required to convict Penny as a principal.

HOLDINGS

1. The State failed to present evidence of either element necessary to convict Penny as a principal: a conscious intent that the crimes be committed and an overt act or words intended to incite, cause, encourage, assist, or advise another person to commit the crimes. The trial court therefore erred in denying the motion for judgment of acquittal.
2. The evidence was insufficient to permit a rational trier of fact to find beyond a reasonable doubt that Penny possessed the requisite intent or satisfied the requirements for principal liability.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“ “[I]n order to be a principal in a crime, one must have a conscious intent that the crime be done and must do some act or say some word which was intended to and does incite, cause, encourage, assist, or advise another person to actually commit the crime.” ” (at 1)

“ “[T]here must be proof of some overt act, or some words uttered, in furtherance of the scheme that led to the [crime].” ” (at 1)

“ Here, the State failed to present evidence of either element necessary to convict Penny as a principal to the crimes.” (at 1)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Penny was convicted as a principal to two attempted second-degree murders and two aggravated batteries with a deadly weapon. The State's theory included evidence that Penny drove the vehicle from which the shots were fired. The State did not present evidence establishing that Penny had the conscious intent that the crimes be committed or that he performed an overt act or uttered words in furtherance of the criminal scheme.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Penny was charged and convicted as a principal to all four offenses in the Circuit Court for Hillsborough County. After the State rested, he moved for judgment of acquittal on the ground that the State had presented no evidence that he acted as a principal. The trial court denied the motion, and the appellate court reversed and remanded for discharge.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Reverse the judgment and sentences and remand for discharge.

CASES CITED

- Dixon v. State, 401 So. 3d 610, 610 (Fla. 2d DCA 2025)
- State v. Tovar, 110 So. 3d 33, 36 (Fla. 2d DCA 2013)
- Williams v. State, 314 So. 3d 775, 787 (Fla. 1st DCA 2021)
- Farris v. State, 406 So. 3d 951, 958 (Fla. 4th DCA 2025)
- Staten v. State, 519 So. 2d 622, 624 (Fla. 1988)
- Collins v. State, 438 So. 2d 1036, 1038 (Fla. 2d DCA 1983)
- Bush v. State, 295 So. 3d 179, 200 (Fla. 2020)
- Rogers v. State, 285 So. 3d 872, 891 (Fla. 2019)
- Stark v. State, 316 So. 2d 586, 587 (Fla. 4th DCA 1975)
- Enmund v. State, 399 So. 2d 1362, 1370 (Fla. 1981), rev'd on other grounds, 458 U.S. 782 (1982)
- Hall v. State, 100 So. 3d 288, 289 (Fla. 4th DCA 2012)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL OF FLORIDA SECOND DISTRICT JAQUONE R. PENNY, Appellant, v. STATE OF FLORIDA, Appellee. No. 2D2024-0032 October 1, 2025 Appeal from the Circuit Court for Hillsborough County; Christine Ann Marlewski, Judge. Rachael E. Reese of Rachael Reese, P.A., Tampa, for Appellant. James Uthmeier, Attorney General, Tallahassee, and Krystle Celine Cacci, Assistant Attorney General, Tampa, for Appellee.

BLACK, Judge. Jaquone R. Penny appeals from his judgment and sentences for two counts of attempted second-degree murder and two counts of aggravated battery with a deadly weapon. We reverse and remand for discharge. Penny was charged and convicted as a principal to all crimes.

After the State rested its case, Penny moved for judgment of acquittal, arguing that the State had failed to present any evidence that Penny acted as a principal to the crimes. "[I]n order to be a principal in a crime, one must have a conscious intent that the crime be done and must do some act or say some word which was intended to and does incite, cause, encourage, assist, or advise another person to actually commit the crime."

Dixon v. State, 401 So. 3d 610, 610 (Fla. 2d DCA 2025) (alteration in original) (quoting State v. Tovar, 110 So. 3d 33, 36 (Fla. 2d DCA 2013)). "[T]here must be proof of some overt act, or some words uttered, in furtherance of the scheme that led to the [crime]." Williams v. State, 314 So. 3d 775, 787 (Fla. 1st DCA 2021).

Here, the State failed to present evidence of either element necessary to convict Penny as a principal to the crimes. See Farris v. State, 406 So. 3d 951, 958 (Fla. 4th DCA 2025) ("[T]he State

was required to prove that Farris had a conscious intent for Alford to shoot the victim unjustifiably, and that Farris did some act which was intended to assist him.").

The trial court erred in denying Penny's motion for judgment of acquittal. Reversed and remanded for discharge. KELLY, J., Concurr. ATKINSON, J., Concurr in result only. ATKINSON, Judge, Concurring in result only. I agree with the majority that there was insufficient evidence that Penny had "a conscious intent that the crime be done." See *Dixon v. State*, 401 So.

3d 610, 610 (Fla. 2d DCA 2025) (quoting *State v. Tovar*, 110 So. 3d 33, 36 (Fla. 2d DCA 2013)); cf. *Staten v. State*, 519 So. 2d 622, 624 (Fla. 1988) ("[M]ere presence at the scene, including driving the 2 perpetrator to and from the scene or a display of questionable behavior after the fact, is not sufficient...." (quoting *Collins v. State*, 438 So. 2d 1036, 1038 (Fla.

2d DCA 1983))). The State did not adduce "competent, substantial evidence" such that "a rational trier of fact could have found... beyond a reasonable doubt," see *Bush v. State*, 295 So. 3d 179, 200 (Fla. 2020) (quoting *Rogers v. State*, 285 So. 3d 872, 891 (Fla. 2019)), that Penny "had the requisite intent" that the crimes be committed or "knew" that the individual who pulled the trigger "had that intent," see *Staten*, 519 So.

2d at 624 (citing *Stark v. State*, 316 So. 2d 586, 587 (Fla. 4th DCA 1975)). Cf. *Staten*, 519 So. 2d at 624 ("[T]he getaway driver who has prior knowledge of the criminal plan and is 'waiting to help the robbers escape'... is... a principal." (emphasis added) (quoting *Enmund v. State*, 399 So. 2d 1362, 1370 (Fla. 1981), rev'd on other grounds, 458 U.S. 782 (1982))); *Hall v. State*, 100 So.

3d 288, 289 (Fla. 4th DCA 2012) ("[W]hile there was evidence from which a jury might have concluded that the defendant became aware of the crime after it was committed, there was no evidence the defendant had any prior knowledge of a criminal plan or had a conscious intent that the robbery be committed.").

However, had the State been able to adduce adequate evidence that Penny had the requisite intent that the crimes of attempted murder and aggravated battery be committed, there would have been sufficient evidence in the record to support the other component required to convict a defendant as a principal—the commission of "some act" or utterance of "some word which was intended to and does incite, cause, encourage, assist, or advise another person to actually commit the crime."

See *Dixon*, 401 So. 3d at 610 (quoting *Tovar*, 110 So. 3d at 36). There was competent, substantial evidence from which a rational jury could have concluded beyond a reasonable doubt that Penny was the driver of the vehicle from which the shots were fired and that he "aid[ed]" or "abet[ted]" the commission of the offenses. See § 777.011, Fla. Stat. (2023) ("Whoever... aids, abets, counsels, hires, or otherwise procures such offense to be committed, and such offense is committed or is attempted to be committed, is a principal in the first degree and may be charged, convicted, and punished as such....").

Consequently, I respectfully concur in result only. Opinion subject to revision prior to official publication. 4

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